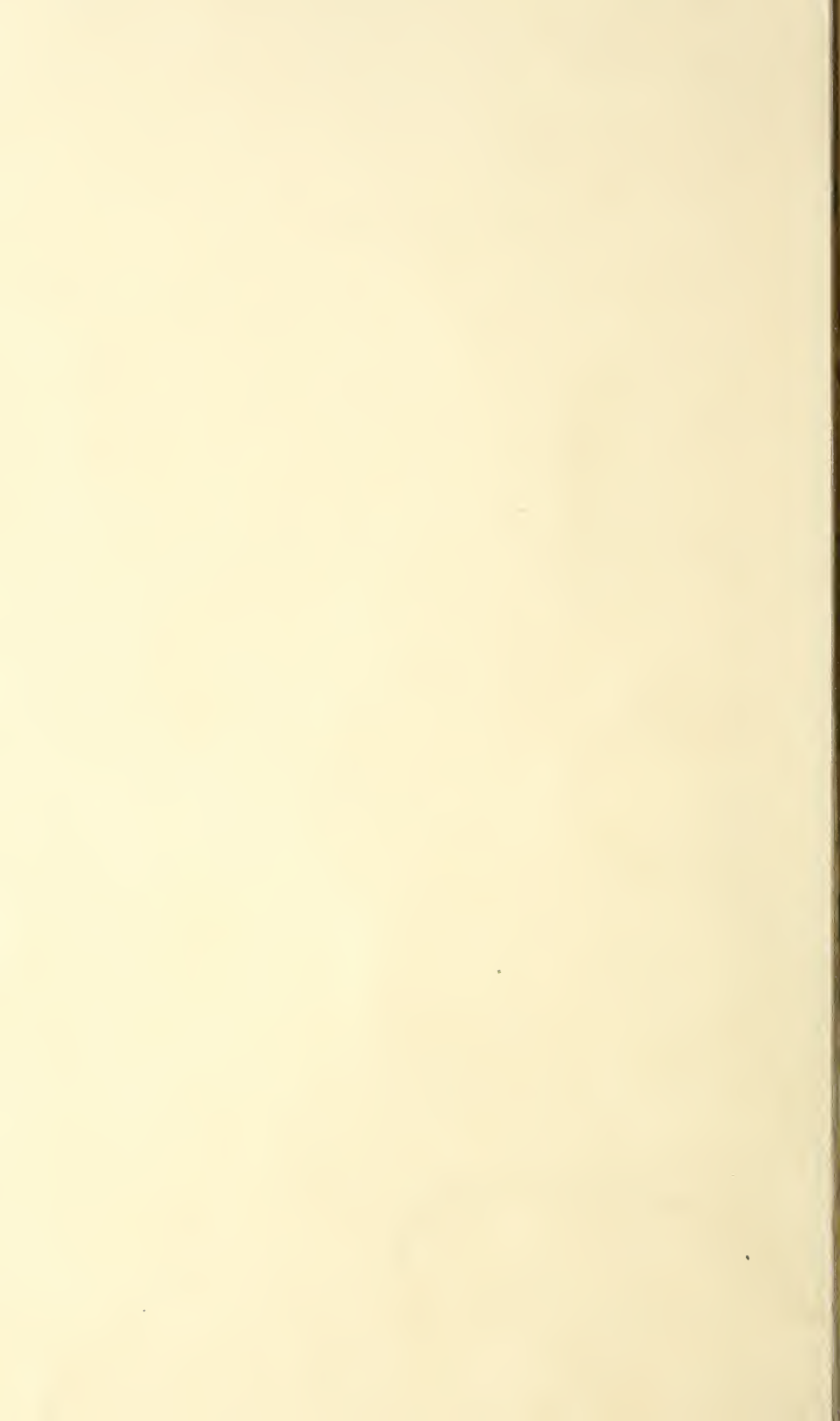


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DIVISION

HANDLING THE 1918 WHEAT HARVEST IN KANSAS

EDWARD C. JOHNSON

Dean of the Division of College Extension, Kansas
State Agricultural College



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Circular 121

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Washington, D. C.

October, 1918

HOW Kansas met the harvest emergency in 1918, and overcame the shortage of labor due to the call of her young men to the front, is a story full of encouragement.

Kansas not only saved her wheat and helped to fill the bins for the fighters, but she showed how it is possible for whole communities, even an entire State, to work unitedly for a common object.

HANDLING THE 1918 WHEAT HARVEST IN KANSAS.

KANSAS harvested approximately 7,000,000 acres of wheat this year without material loss, in spite of the fact that very unusual and difficult conditions confronted her farmers in securing sufficient man power for the harvest. The lack of men created by the war demands of the nation was aggravated by the increase in railroad fares to three cents plus the war tax. This high rate for transportation tended to discourage a large portion of the usual number of men who normally follow the harvest, and who were not already engaged in war work, from coming into the State or from following the harvest about the State. In addition to this, an abnormally hot wave in June ripened the wheat 10 days earlier than usual, particularly in the north, making the harvest season at least 10 days shorter than usual.

Difficulties met
in 1918.

The necessary harvest labor, however, was supplied. The State Farm Help Specialist, E. E. Frizell, representing the Extension Division of the Kansas State Agricultural College, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the Kansas State Council of Defense, the Federal Department of Labor under the leadership of A. L. Barkman, and the county agent force of 60 men made unusual efforts and handled the labor satisfactorily with a minimum of lost motion or waste of labor.

State Farm
Help Specialist.

Early in the year Mr. Frizell estimated, on the basis of a labor survey made by the county agent force in cooperation with the schools, that the State would need from 90,000 to 100,000 men during the harvest. It was evident that a high wage must be offered in order to attract men to the Kansas harvest in sufficient numbers, both from towns and cities within the State and from outside the State. It was also evident that some uniformity of wages should be secured in the State so that an equal distribution of labor and its maximum employment might be obtained.

Nearly 100,000
men needed.

With this end in view, Mr. Frizell visited some 85 of the 105 Kansas counties and held county meetings at which farmers and townspeople discussed the labor prob-

lem. These meetings were followed by eight district meetings, which were held at the following points: Topeka, Minneapolis, Hays, Colby, Kinsley, Garden City, Wichita, and Yates Center. At these district meetings delegates of the farm bureaus and other farmers' organizations from every county in the State met and recommended the wage scales for the districts. They also recommended that labor be paid by the hour instead of by the day, as had been the custom in the past. At the first district meeting the delegates assembled suggested that after the eight district meetings had been held a State-wide meeting should be called at which definite action could be taken to establish a State-wide wage scale for the harvest. After all district meetings were held the State meeting was called at Salina. The 200 or more delegates represented every section of the State. Forty-five cents per hour was decided on as a fair and liberal wage. The hour method of computing working time as recommended by the district conferences was accepted.

State-wide
meeting fixes for-
ty-five cents an
hour.

This feature of the labor work alone, because it limited the "hit and miss," blind travel of harvest labor, not only saved farmers and laborers in Kansas thousands of dollars but furnished a maximum degree of employment of all labor in the State; laborers knew that wherever work was waiting in the wheat belt it paid a standard, fair, and liberal wage. In addition this plan saved tens of thousands of bushels of wheat from going to waste.

County agents
and extension
force at work.

The county agent force and the central extension offices at the college rendered Mr. Frizell every possible assistance in this feature of the work and were largely responsible for calling these meetings, advertising, securing the delegations, and the actual conduct of the meetings. The daily and weekly press of the State gave most hearty cooperation and the publicity thus given made every meeting a success.

While Mr. Frizell felt that some floating harvest labor would be available, he did not place dependence on this source of supply but decided to call on the towns and cities of Kansas to furnish every possible help. Therefore, late in May a definite method of recruiting town and city dwellers was developed in the County Agent Leader's office at the college in cooperation with Mr. Frizell, and recruiting work was started, under the authority of a proclamation by the Governor, in all the larger towns and cities of the State as well as in Kansas City and

St. Joseph, Missouri. Definite records were obtained of approximately 30,000 men enrolled in 500 towns, who signified their willingness to go into the harvest if called. It is estimated that many more of whom records were not obtained agreed to go into the harvest. This work of recruiting was largely carried on by the county and emergency agents, with the chambers of commerce and retailers' associations in cooperation. The State Council of Defense endorsed the movement. The county councils of defense gave material help at many points. In Kansas City, through the Chamber of Commerce under the leadership and inspiration of Dr. H. J. Waters, of the Kansas City Star, and chairman of the Kansas State Council of Defense, especially notable work was done. Dr. W. M. Jardine, president of the Kansas State Agricultural College, by public addresses in the larger cities of the State, rendered valuable service in molding and shaping public opinion for the drive.

Just prior to the harvest rush the United States Department of Labor opened headquarters at Wichita and established 20 local labor offices in the State. These offices did excellent work in recruiting labor from outside the State and undertook the active distribution of it in the State.

In farm bureau counties the agents, in nearly every case, accepted the entire responsibility of reporting the labor needs of the county to the federal labor offices, and of distributing the harvest hands after they arrived in the county. This was accomplished with great difficulty in many counties; in Cheyenne and Rawlins Counties, for instance, the agents were forced to organize a transport system that brought the harvest hands in from the main line railroads by automobile an average distance of about 30 miles. In other counties, however, this distribution was not so difficult and was accomplished by the county agent offices through a system of volunteer local labor offices in each well defined community which reported to the central county agent's office in each county.

While the unexpected early rush of the harvest caught a comparatively few communities short of labor for a few days as the harvest started, these needs were quickly filled and no part of the State reported any wheat wasted for want of labor. All observers agree, however, that the harvest labor problem was handled much more

efficiently in counties with farm bureaus and county agents than in other counties. These counties got their labor sooner, distributed it better, were better supplied, and as a rule finished the harvest earlier than the latter.

Railway agri-
cultural agents
assist.

In the general work of distributing the labor the agricultural agents of the Santa Fe, the Frisco, and the Katy railway systems gave material assistance. H. M. Bainer of the Santa Fe, who was drafted for this work by the agricultural college and the United States Department of Agriculture, gave particularly valuable assistance in enrolling town men in Kansas City and St. Joseph and later in the distribution work. Many secretaries of commercial clubs, as well as other citizens of the State, gave a large amount of time to this work.

Probably 90,000
extra hands used.

Complete data as to the total number of harvest hands used in the 1918 harvest are not available from all counties. The county agents, however, kept records and gave careful estimates of 69 counties. Add to these the records of the 20 local labor offices of the Federal Department of Labor and of the Federal office at Enid, Okla., and a fair estimate may be obtained. Mr. Bainer reports that there is a record of 18,511 men handled by these local labor offices of the Department of Labor.

Sixty-nine counties in the State which are served by county agents, including four which were represented by chamber of commerce secretaries, have reported that they cleared through their offices a total of 18,696 harvest hands who came from outside their counties. These same counties report that a total of 7,802 men from local towns and cities were used, the majority of whom apparently were "twilight" shockers who went out in squads and worked for about three hours each evening for several evenings. Many of these men worked but a single evening, a few as many as 10, while some went into the fields for full days. As a direct result of the State-wide campaign for harvest labor, a very large number of retired farmers and other townspeople went back into the harvest this year, but were not enumerated in the reports, as they did not register or clear through the county agent offices or Federal labor offices. The reports indicate that less than 5 per cent of women were used in the harvest this year. This may be a low estimate.

Retired farmers
come into action.

Young boys
used.

A large number of young boys also were used, and it is probable that the original estimate of Mr. Frizell of

90,000 extra harvest hands was more than met when all sources of labor are considered. The greater efficiency among farmers in the use of labor, due to increased cost, also was marked.

It was reported that a total of 3,462 town men from those recruited in Kansas City and St. Joseph, Mo., and Kansas City, Atchison, and Leavenworth, Kans., went out into the harvest through the Federal labor offices of those cities. This was out of a total of 15,376 men in these towns who pledged themselves to go if needed. Many other towns in Kansas report that only a few of the hundreds of city men signing the enrollment cards went out. This was due to some extent to the reluctance of the city man to leave his home county, and to the fact that the majority of the counties in which the larger towns existed had almost no labor problem. It is altogether certain, however, that had the harvest situation been such that it could not have been handled in any other way, the majority of the men who enlisted would have gladly fulfilled their pledge.

All needs met.

For the next harvest there will be need for every one of these volunteers and more, and when the demand comes there is no question that the city man will do his utmost to help Uncle Sam in the harvest field as well as on the battle line. The town and city men who helped this year will help again. They will bring others. More women will help as needed, and the Kansas farmer, with renewed courage, faith, and hope, will "carry on" and plant a record acreage to wheat this fall, supremely confident that if the Lord brings a good harvest, harvesters will not be wanting.

Success gives
confidence for
next year.



